

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 STATE 084666 TOSEC 030179
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TO USDEL SECRETARY IMMEDIATE

INFO AMEMBASSY MOSCOW IMMEDIATE

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S E C R E T STATE 084666 TOSEC 030179

NODIS

CHEROKEE, USSALTTWO FM GELD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TA SALT

SUBJECT: SOVIET RESPONSE ON BACKFIRE

1. BESSMERTNYKH CALLED TODAY TO DELIVER THE SOVIET RESPONSE TO OUR DEMARCHE ON BACKFIRE. TEXT OF SOVIET RESPONSE FOLLOWS IN PARAGRAPH 3. IN PRESENTING THE PAPER, BESSMERTNYKH SAID THAT HE HAD NO INSTRUCTIONS BUT, SPEAKING PERSONALLY, HIS MESSAGE BASICALLY WAS THAT THE SOVIETS HAD WALKED THEIR LAST MILE ON THIS ISSUE LAST SEPTEMBER, AND THAT THEIR OFFER OF A UNILATERAL LETTER HAD REPRESENTED A DIFFICULT POLITICAL DECISION. HE STRESSED THAT OUR PRESSING THEM FURTHER WOULD IMPAIR CHANCES FOR SUCCESS OF THE MOSCOW VISIT LATER THIS MONTH. HE SAID THE NOTION OF PRESENTING AN EXCHANGE OF DOCUMENTS TO CONGRESS WAS TOTALLY UNACCEPTABLE TO THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP. IT CAME DOWN, BESS-
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MERTNYKH CLAIMED, TO A QUESTION OF WHETHER WE WERE WILLING TO ACCEPT THE ASSURANCES OF THE HIGHEST POLITICAL LEVEL IN THE SOVIET UNION.

2. I RESPONDED THAT I TOO WAS WITHOUT INSTRUCTIONS AND THAT WHAT I WOULD SAY WAS PERSONAL. I SAID THAT WE DID NOT REGARD THE ISSUE AS SETTLED WITH THE SOVIET DRAFT LETTER, AND

THAT WE HAD MADE THIS CLEAR DURING THE SEPTEMBER TALKS, AND THAT WE HAD NEVER CONCEDED THAT BACKFIRE WAS A MEDIUM BOMBER. I SAID THAT THE SOVIETS SHOULD SEE OUR COMING BACK ON BACKFIRE IN THE CONTEXT OF AN EFFORT TO RESOLVE THIS AND

OTHER OUTSTANDING ISSUES AS WE SOUGHT TO MOVE FORWARD. IT WAS NOT A MATTER OF TRUST OR DOUBTING THE WORD OF THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP, BUT ONE OF ESTABLISHING THE FACTS AND CAPABILITIES OF THE SYSTEM. AS HE LEFT, BESSMERTYNKH ASKED IF THIS WERE A US BARGAINING PLOY TO GET SOME ADDITIONAL CONCESSIONS, AND I RESPONDED THAT IT WAS NOT A PLOY, BUT OUR REAL POSITION BASED ON THE FACTS OF THE MATTER.

3. BEGIN TEXT:

THE FACT THAT THE US SIDE RAISED AGAIN THE QUESTION OF THE BACKFIRE AND THE WAY IT WAS DONE ARE REGARDED IN MOSCOW NOT ONLY AS INCOMPATIBLE WITH SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF WORKING OUT THE SALT AGREEMENT BUT, ON THE CONTRARY, AS ACTUALLY AIMED AT FURTHER COMPLICATING THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THAT GOAL. SUCH POSITIONS IN NO WAY AGREE WITH THE ASSURANCES BY THE US SIDE THAT IT IS PREPARED TO MAKE NEW EFFORTS TO REACH AN EARLY AGREEMENT.

AS IS KNOWN, A MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING WAS ALREADY ACHIEVED EARLIER THAT NO PROVISIONS CONCERNING THAT AIRCRAFT
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SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN BILATERAL DOCUMENTS. IT CANNOT BE OTHERWISE SINCE, AS THE US SIDE ITSELF ALSO ADMITS, THE SAID AIRCRAFT IS A MEDIUM-RANGE BOMBER AND THUS, NATURALLY, HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH THE SUBJECT-MATTER OF THE NEGOTIATIONS. THE FACT THAT THE SOVIET SIDE EXPRESSED READINESS TO MAKE A UNILATERAL STATEMENT CONCERNING THAT AIRCRAFT IS A MANIFESTATION OF OUR GOOD WILL AND DESIRE TO ENSURE A GENERAL ADVANCE AT THE NEGOTIATIONS. OF COURSE, OUR AGREEMENT TO MAKE THAT STEP DOES NOT IN ANY WAY AFFECT THE SOVIET POSITION OF PRINCIPLE ON THE SUBJECT.

NOW, IN SPITE OF THE ABOVE-MENTIONED MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING, THE US SIDE RAISES THE QUESTION OF SOME KIND OF AGREEMENT REGARDING THE BACKFIRE, WHICH SHOULD BE A PART OF THE DOCUMENTS BEING WORKED OUT. WE WISH TO CLEARLY STATE ONCE MORE THAT THIS IS COMPLETELY UNACCEPTABLE TO US.

IN THE COURSE OF THE CONVERSATIONS IN WASHINGTON LAST SEPTEMBER THE CONTENTS OF A UNILATERAL STATEMENT WHICH WE COULD MAKE AT AN APPROPRIATE TIME WERE MADE KNOWN TO THE US SIDE. THE LATTER REGARDED IT AS AN IMPORTANT STEP TO HAVE THE ENTIRE QUESTION CLOSED. AT THAT TIME ADDITIONAL WISHES

WERE CONCERNED, IN FACT, WITH SOME POSSIBLE SPECIFICATION OF THE RATE OF PRODUCTION OF THE AIRCRAFT.

AND NOW THE US SIDE ENUMERATES A WHOLE LIST OF QUESTIONS ACTUALLY AIMED NOT MERELY AT LIMITATIONS ON THE BACKFIRE - WHICH IS UNACCEPTABLE IN ITSELF - BUT AT LIMITATIONS SO DETAILED AND

SO FAR-REACHING THAT ARE NOT PROVIDED EVEN FOR ANY SINGLE TYPE OF STRATEGIC OFFENSIVE ARMS TO BE INCLUDED IN THE AGREEMENT UNDER PREPARATION. AN ATTEMPT IS EVEN MADE TO PULL INTO THE DISCUSSION ALSO OTHER SOVIET AIRCRAFT: MEDIUM-RANGE BOMBERS.

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IT IS DIFFICULT FOR US TO SAY WHAT THE US SIDE COUNTS UPON BY RAISING NOW ALL THOSE QUESTIONS. ONE THING IS CLEAR -- THIS IS NOT A BUSINESSLIKE APPROACH. OUR OPINION IS PLAIN AND UNEQUIVOCAL. WE CANNOT AND WILL NOT ACCEPT SUCH LIMITATIONS WITH REGARD TO THE BACKFIRE NOR DO WE AGREE TO MAKING IT A PART OF THE AGREEMENT.

ONE HAS TO REGISTER THE FACT THAT HERE AGAIN WE DEAL WITH THE POSITION WHICH HAS BEEN TAKEN BY THE US IN RECENT MONTHS AT THE NEGOTIATIONS IN GENEVA WHERE THE US SIDE DOES NOT SHOW READINESS TO SEEK MUTUALLY ACCEPTABLE SOLUTIONS TO OUTSTANDING ISSUES BUT, INSTEAD, PUTS FORWARD AGAIN AND AGAIN ALL SORTS OF CONDITIONS AND RESERVATIONS. THIS COURSE HAS ALREADY RESULTED IN THE FACT THAT THE NEGOTIATIONS ADVANCE EXTREMELY SLOWLY, AND ON A NUMBER OF QUESTIONS THEY HAVE ACTUALLY STALLED. IN NO WAY SUCH A POSITION CONTRIBUTES EITHER TO A PRODUCTIVE PREPARATION FOR SECRETARY VANCE'S VISIT TO MOSCOW, TO MAKING THIS VISIT, AS IT WAS AGREED, HELPFUL IN FINDING SOLUTIONS TO REMAINING ISSUES. WE HOPE THAT THE US SIDE WILL DRAW APPROPRIATE CONCLUSIONS FROM THESE CONSIDERATIONS OF OURS.

AS FAR AS THE QUESTION OF BACKFIRE IS CONCERNED, WE CONFIRM OUR POSITION OF PRINCIPLE ON THIS MATTER AS WELL AS OUR READINESS TO MAKE A UNILATERAL STATEMENT IN THE SPIRIT WE HAVE ALREADY COMMUNICATED TO THE US SIDE. FROM THAT STATEMENT IT CLEARLY FOLLOWS THAT THE SAID AIRCRAFT CANNOT HIT TARGETS IN THE US TERRITORY AND THAT THE SOVIET UNION DOES NOT INTEND TO GIVE IT IN ANY WAY SUCH CAPABILITY. IT IS OUR FIRM STATEMENT AND THERE CAN BE NO GROUNDS TO QUESTION IT. COOPER

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